

focus

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Use care when buying used bikes

Look at secondhand peddlers

If the rising price of bicycles stands between you and a new ten-speed, consider buying a used bicycle instead. You can save money and be reasonably sure the bicycle will serve you well.

WHERE TO LOOK FOR A USED BIKE

Bargain-finder type of advertising papers are a good place to look because cyclists use them more than newspaper ads.

Cycling clubs are a good source especially for higher-quality machines. Some have newsletters you can advertise in, virtually all have friendly members you can ask for help.

Some bicycle shops sell used bikes and you may get helpful advice from a sympathetic dealer who also hopes you'll remember him when you want to trade up.

Know anyone who rents out bicycles? He updates stock periodically. Groups that run organized bicycle tours may be an especially good source,

since they need to maintain a stable of ten-speeds for rent.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

You can't have your pick of brands or colors, you'll have enough trouble finding a bicycle in your frame size. If you don't know your frame size, get fitted for it at a bicycle shop. The previous owner of the bike you're buying may not even know the difference between frame size and wheel size.

If you want a high-quality bicycle allow more time for looking. Better bikes aren't sold as often. Settle for at least the basic, reasonable-quality adult ten-speed: one with a lugged-and-brazed frame of straight-gauge seamless steel tubing. The popular, adult ten-speeds from dozens of foreign and a few domestic manufacturers all fit this description and at today's new bike prices, start on the high side of \$150.

What should you expect to pay? There is no tidy formula like the "blue book" for used cars. A used bicycle in good condition may command between

60% to 100% of its original price. A bicycle which cost \$125 nine years ago is closer to \$200, especially if it just sat in someone's house. Ultimately, the price will depend upon supply and demand and your negotiating savvy.

Be sure to ask for proof of original purchase because you may be dickering for stolen goods. And steer clear of off-beat hardware because replacement parts could be a major problem someday.

Before you shop, borrow and ride a bike so you have the basis for comparison. If possible, test several different bikes that way.

INSPECTING THE MERCHANDISE

A ten-minute inspection can tell you how much is wrong and how much it would cost to fix. Add this figure to the seller's asking price and you'll know the true cost of purchasing the bike.

Here are some important things to look for:

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